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BENDING GEN(RE)DER: THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY THROUGH
LANGUAGE IN HÉLÈNE CIXOUS AND THE SELF

By

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Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in English Literature

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2010

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A Brief Abstract of *Bending Gen(re)der*

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Bending Gen(re)der: The Negotiation of Identity through Language in Hélène Cixous and the Self analyses the French author Hélène Cixous and her most recently published book, *Love Itself in the Letterbox*. The book cannot be said to fit into a specific genre but moves through a series of musings surrounding her personal history with France, New York, authors she has been influenced by, her relationship with mother, and most often the contemplation of her lover. Cixous' use of *écriture féminine* (women's writing) layers the writing to create a playful, confusing, incongruent body of work in an attempt to subvert the phallogocentric.

In my thesis I contemplate this *écriture féminine* and explore how Cixous has used it to understand identity through gender, memory, and language. I expand on her sometimes-limited sense of herself out of the binary of feminine writing and into what I refer to as *queer ecrtiure* in hopes to move past that binary and into a more radical understanding of gender and language by allowing the two conceptual genders to be at play within any body. Through a deconstruction of both gender and genre, this thesis makes a detour away from a traditional masters thesis and turns toward a more creative and explorative critical analysis.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my professors Casey, Katie, and Benedicte for encouraging me to move outside of the strict lines of the thesis and into a place of continual excitement.

To my parents who supported me beyond themselves, I am truly grateful.

And to Matthew, who always allows me to write our love bravely.

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Introduction

Biography, Criticism, and Engagement of Cixous and her work

“We are not what we are said to be.”

– Cixous, Preface to *The Reader*

Hélène Cixous was born to a Spanish/French/Jewish father and Austro-German/Jewish mother on June 5, 1937, in Oran, Algeria. As a child she was surrounded by a variety of languages and cultural influences including German and French and to a lesser degree Spanish and Arabic. She moved to France to attend school where she still resides. This immigration deeply influenced Cixous’ sense of home and multi-faceted identity. She writes often of the complicated relationship with her mother and her father’s death from tuberculosis when Hélène was still a young girl also had the effect of reemphasizing her longing for home. Ultimately, however, despite Cixous’ understandable preoccupation with her personal history and the past she represent a radical new way of thinking and writing that emerged in the late 1960’s due to what she describes in her academic setting as an over saturation of men. She states, “It was always men. Each time I came up against a wall, except for two or three exceptional works which did not prohibit me. But I was always speaking in the place of someone else.

Where was my place then? Where were the women?” (“At Hélène Cixous’ Pleasure,” broadcast in 1987).¹

Cixous began publishing in the 1960’s and has worked within and outside of the forms of novel, philosophy, playwriting, non-fiction, and cultural theory. She asserts that she was influenced by the French writers Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida (who she continued a close personal relationship with) as well as by the work of Freud, Heidegger, Kafka, Rilke, Shakespeare, and Joyce (who she studied in her graduate work), along with many others and most sustainably and vitally with Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (*Reader*, xxx). Her work engages ideas of feminism, family, love, language, current theorists, current cultural events, and an unending and expansive inclusion of just about anything that can be related to the every day understanding of self (including in her most recent book and the focus of this thesis, *Love Itself in the Letterbox* – cauliflower, feline sexuality, the writing of authors from Derrida to Oliver de Serres, cities across the world, and the always returning love letter). She has taught at the Université de Bordeaux, the Sorbonne, the experimental Université de Paris VIII at Vincennes which she helped found in 1968 as well as the Centre de Recherches en Etudes Féminines where she still resides as the chair of the center.

Cixous’ most famous work moves around a theory called *écriture féminine* (women’s writing) which was a movement that shifted the shape of feminism in the late 20th Century. Associated with the foundation of this movement were a few key authors: Monique Wittig, Julie Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous. In the essay “Writing on the Body: Toward an Understanding of l’Ecriture feminine,” Ann Rosalind Jones

¹ For more extensive autobiographical information see written by Jacques Derrida, Susan Sellers, and Hélène Cixous see: Cixous, Hélène, and Susan Sellers. The Hélène Cixous Reader. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.

states of these four women, “[they] share a common opponent, masculinist thinking their common ground is an analysis of Western culture as fundamentally oppressive and phallogocentric” (Rosalind, 1). While all three had different perspectives and styles of *écriture féminine*, the basic principle was a movement out of the normalized masculine dominated form of writing and into a less fixed, more playful, multiple, feminine understanding of language (*Reader*, xxvi-xxx).

The movement had strong ties to the deconstructionist movement and Cixous’ most influential philosopher was the great deconstructionist, the late Jacques Derrida. Robert Parker, in a summary of the modern schools of thought acutely states, “Deconstruction, in and of itself, is almost dead, but it retains enormous influence on current critical thinking” (Parker, 77). He goes on to say of this influence, “deconstruction is not destruction. It can change the way we view things, but it does not destroy anything. It offers more, not less. In deconstruction, there is always more, a surplus of meaning and rhetoric” (Parker, 78). By “offering more,” we can see how if we attempt to set two things up in opposition to each other and try to understand them, they can then only be understood in relation to one another and therefore they have no fixity on their own. They instead offer up a multiplicity of definitions because they cannot conform to one definition.

Under this understanding of deconstruction and the influence that it has had on Cixous and the French feminist movement that followed it, the shift in language itself becomes essential to hope for a shift in culture. Parker’s summary finally hits on this when he states, “But deconstructionists do not believe that systems can be secure or unified or that we can capture cultural objects with single explanations...everything is

multiple, unstable, and without unity” (Parker, 79). Writing or reading in a deconstructionist manner then is both incredibly challenging because it dwells within intentional chaos, or more positively put, multiplicity of meaning, yet highly liberating from essentializing or fixing either language or culture, therefore breaking down typical hierarchies. This breakdown or movement away from hierarchies, specifically those in patriarchal society, is where the French feminists found deconstruction useful.

About deconstruction, Robert Dale Parker states, “Regardless, to produce a deconstructionist reading, critics typically pick out part of a text and study its language, rhetoric, and figuration with great intensity, searching out ways that the text unravels its own assumptions and produces more meaning than it can unify and more meaning than a simple structure can contain” (Parker, 83). Again, this kind of deconstruction permeates Cixous’ work. *The Reader* states, “Cixous outlines how thinking has become dependent on a process of differentiation entailing opposition to and annihilation of whatever is thereby constituted as other” (xxviii). She suggests that we cannot “identify” without identifying in relation to the other; therefore we are always deconstructed because we cannot be defined exclusively and independently. The introduction goes on to summarize her views of a specifically gendered deconstruction saying, “we all continually fluctuate between gender roles, sometimes assuming defensive, ‘masculine’ positions, at other times willing to risk prohibition, and at other times combining elements of each. The terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, therefore, can be viewed as markers which could be exchanged for others” (xxviii). As I study the work of Hélène Cixous, I find myself attempting to unravel her work in this way, to open it up, even beyond its own openings, to intersect and converse with her, even in the confines of the “simple structure” Parker

asserts as any defining place. For aren't two simple structures in communication with one another more than one alone?

Cixous is aware of the deconstructive reading and therefore does not write in a way that assumes a fixed meaning. In fact, she uses the intentional confusion of *écriture* to create a work that can be mis- and re- read upon each new analysis of the work. I engage and critique her argument that “feminine writing will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression...and thus create a new framework for a new ‘language’ and culture” (*Reader*, xxix). French Feminism itself, and the writing that emerges from this movement, defies traditional male western rationalism which is seen to have repressed a more wholistic, circular, inclusive analysis and composition of work. In two ways, feminine writing can be distinguished from traditional writing. *The Hélène Cixous Reader* states that firstly, “Cixous suggests that feminine writing is potentially the province of both sexes, [but] she believes that women are currently closer to a feminine economy” (xxix). I expand on the idea that both sexes can inhabit an alternative writing by moving into an imagination of a writing that both sexes, or rather all people can inhabit. Secondly, *The Reader* describes feminine writing in Cixous’ opinion as, “a feminine subject position [that] refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other’s difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery², Cixous suggests that a feminine writing will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression” (xxix).

In an effort to communicate with and represent Cixous most fully, I write in response to the feminine writing style and begin to work through the question of how to

² Interestingly enough, this introduction is an attempt at a clear and phallogocentric explanation of the following queer writing, which is a necessary step toward achieving my “masters” degree.

move past the reaffirmed binary that writing in a “woman’s” style creates. Instead, I deconstruct gender stereotypes and gendered identity and move into a space where writing outside of the masculine and inside of the feminine is bent into a more queer writing or *queer ecriture* if you will, because these essentialized gendered/genred oppositions have never existed in a tangible way but only (and persistently) ideologically. While masculine writing is described as the language which is the set framework in which we view culture and identity, the “maintained status quo” (*Reader*, xxviii), feminine writing is summarized by Cixous as,

a place (...) which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds (xxix).

I attempt to merge Cixous’ idea with my own to move into a writing that contains more inclusion. Cixous states that “the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, therefore, can be viewed as markers which could be exchanged for others” which signals that masculine and feminine are simply labels and not some innate part of self. And yet I dissent from her often exclusive tone toward men who are encumbered by the “masculine” when I move away from the “status quo” of writing to inhabit both the deconstruction of gender, and therefore the ability to inhabit the ‘masculine’ without being dominated by the normalized culture. This space is what I call genre bending, and it is a space of queering our conception of gender, moment, and words so that the bend in the language creates a bend in our understanding of identity.

At this point I would like to offer up a working definition of queer and then my own working definition of “bending” in the context of this thesis. Eve Sedgwick describes queer as, “a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word ‘queer’ itself means *across* – it comes from the Indo-European root –*terkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (traverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*....Keenly, it is relational and strange” (*Tendencies*, xii). In other words, it cannot be clearly classified or defined, it is continually in motion *across* our normalized waters. Under this definition it is understandable how this word has functioned sexually and at this point I am attempting to give it another layer within language – to move across the normalization of words, to bend their “innateness.” “Bending” now deserves a more full description. I use the word bend because I want to make clear that (like my use of the word queer and its definition as moving across without fixity) I am not attempting to *break* language, but rather to work within (across) words and to expose their ever-expanding multiplicity so as to convey that same parallel in self-identity. Examples of this include punning or intentionally misusing words, reappropriating punctuation so as to symbolize the lack of fixity (Cixous does this when she refuses to use periods at the ends of her sentences, therefore never fully completely ending a process of thought), and combining traditional academic writing with poetry, memoir, and fiction to create genre bending. In this thesis, these larger moments of my own personal dissention or bending will appear in italics to give the reader a map to follow and navigate through.

Cixous’ work is intentionally deconstructionist and doesn’t assume a singular meaning. It is always in play. Therefore deconstructing the work itself isn’t the most valuable approach because her work already assumes multiplicity, so what I seek to do is

converse with the multiple ideas—positing and layering on what might/might not be in her work and expanding on her alternative “feminine” writing which inhabits the multiple but is locked into binaries—and creating as much new/queer work as possible.

Ecriture feminine and the work that it evokes in me, which moves beyond the *feminine* and into the *queer* is the first thing in years that has slowed my writing down, created a space that forced me to see words, language, meaning as expansively multiple. There is intentionality in the words, images, and movements of the work that forces a multiple understanding of myself as writer because it is so fully invested in the multiplicity of language and identity. This is both liberating and incredibly challenging, because if everything (and in this case, most specifically language) has not one essentialized meaning, but rather many, then the assertion of anything definite becomes impossible. It takes an extremely heightened scene of attention to write with awareness of the many meanings one is evoking. In fact, I would dare say it is impossible, yet the effort to further inclusion is still important. According to my argument, no one can ever get at a “true” Truth and so it is the intentional confusion of this thesis that is both frustrating and crucial to engage in. As Cixous says: “I scan these vestiges of the prehistory of the pupil I was, I don’t recognize myself. All of this is very scholarly, proper, and not straying from the road so as to follow the cliff that wavers on its pedestal. There’s no foam, no trembling. It doesn’t induce fright, not even shame. There is nothing wrong” (53). This is my attempt to move out of the “very proper” and into the “trembling” in which there can be growth.

Criticism in reference to French feminism and Hélène Cixous, herself, has emerged in writers such as Diane Crowder, Domna Stanton, Amelia Jones, Rebecca

Clouse, Nancy Miller, Christine Mawkward, Alice Jardine, Jacques Derrida, Peggy Phelan, Mairead Hanrahan, Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler. These authors are preeminent in the field and central to my work in the three following chapters. Christine Mawkward, in her essay “To Be or Not to Be...A Feminist Speaker” summarizes the “view of female creativity” as, “open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to ‘speak the body,’ i.e., the unconscious” (Mawkward, 96). This image of non-fixity clearly strays away from logic-driven canonical work and so evokes strong reactions in many directions. Most criticism revolves around Cixous’ work being done in the 80’s. Surprisingly then, I was unable to find any criticism of her most recent work and the focus of my thesis, *Love Itself in the Letterbox*. While this creates an issue for the comparison of reviews of this book, Cixous continually asserts that her writing is in and of itself a larger work, inclusive of everything she has produced. In this way I enter the critical conversation surrounding Cixous and make my own assertions toward a comprehension of her writing and my own arguments and theories with it.

Love Itself in the Letterbox was published in 2008 and is part fiction, part memoir, part philosophical musing about the implications of language on the reality of events. Because the writing moves over the pages with little structure (only a separation of chapters which indicate a new line of thought) the book reflects the genre bending definition that I employ in my thesis. It is not a linear book, but it does have repetitive themes. In the book, Cixous travels throughout time working through her relationship with the great unnamed *you* of the book. She negotiates her own identity with and without the addressed *you*, (who we are made to assume is male and the person she has been involved with on and off for most of her adult life), and she ruminates about how

their relationship has shaped places, ideas, events, and memories for her. Without any sort of plot driving the book, the reader is able to get lost in the illuminating scenes of love and life musings. There is a sense of being able to enter one's self into the book, to replace the narrator and feel the deep influence of one's own *you*, one's own formulating identity. While *you* does inhabit a traditionally assumed "hetero" space, Cixous does not conform to tropes of marriage, nuclear family, co-habitation, or sustained commitment. In these ways Cixous moves beyond the status quo or relational norms.

I too write from a "hetero" space and must be clear that I do not take on the positionality of overt "homo" activity, and yet I believe that the bend out of these demarcations and definitions of what it is to be hetero or homo and into a reassertion of multi-gendered bodies in relation to each other, moves into a space of queerness. I want to make clear, here that the cultural implications of using queer in a hetero space can be problematic, but I hope to engage "queer" in a way that works theoretically and most specifically within the space of language and so I am attempting this imagination. (Also, I am wary of speaking from any space but my own and so I ask forgiveness for the small space that I take on in these pages. I feel that one can only write from my own quiet corner and hope that the conversation around and outside of my own writing fills in the room.) About the book and the main relationship in it (Cixous and *you*), I argue that Cixous stops short of this queerness because she attempts to enter into the space of the "masculine" and the *you* of the book, but *you* does not enter her, and this imbalance stops short of a queer relation. In my own effort through this thesis, I wish to move past that limiting imbalance.

My engagement with the novel follows through the thesis in this way. At some points the thesis is a criticism of Cixous' work, at some points an affirmation. While I speak theoretically about ideas Cixous is positing according to gender, moment, and the importance of shift in language, I also insert my own intimate experiences as evoked by Cixous' work and these shifts will be signaled by italicized font. This application of alternative choices of engagement with the work becomes a reflection of the kind of cultural change that can be seen through a bending of genre.

As aforementioned, "genre bending" is the term I give my style of writing so as to escape an entrance into the binary of male vs. female writing. Genre bending is a term taken from theorist Rebecca Clouse and she describes it in terms of the French word *voler* which has the double meaning of both to steal and to fly. In her article "Genre Bending with Cixous," she quotes Cixous:

"Flying is woman's gesture—flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything by flying; we've lived in flights, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning [to fly, to steal], that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense...

What woman hasn't flown/stolen? Who hasn't crumbled, held up to ridicule, the bar of separation? Who hasn't inscribed with her body the differential, punctured the system of couples and opposition?"³ (Clouse, 101).

Not only does Clouse point to the importance of the multiplicity in Cixous' use of *voler*, she also calls to a multiplication and revision of meaning in the title of her article "Genre Bending *with* Cixous"⁴ which intimates the irrevocable connection between the herself and Cixous that makes the writing both radical(flying) and intertwined (stealing). This connection points to the inevitable influence reading and engaging in language has over one's reshaping identity. Clouse goes on to say, "Let Genre Bending stand for flying in writing. Let several genres be in question and let them be temporarily resistant to the protocol pressures exerted by the context of an academic" (Clouse, 101). I wish to allow this bend to function in my work, and while it may at times be disconcerting, I believe that to steal/fly from what is simply a repetition of words already said is to attempt to move through the blind belief that there is one way to be, one way to desire, one way to write. This thesis is a kind of mad grasp at the many lines of division, a grasp to twine them together, to mix them up, to open the fences.

³ Cixous, *The Laugh of The Medusa*

⁴ Italics added by me.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter I: Gender

In my first chapter I will be discussing the deconstruction of gender through the gendered stereotypes “masculine” and “feminine”. I am using the terms masculine and feminine as culturally acceptable ideas that attach to what is understood as anatomical sex designations of “sexed bodies.” Let me be explicitly clear at this point that I am not speaking about men and women or even males and females, but rather about the socialized labeling that occurs and is encouraged within gender identity/self/outward stereo-typing. Therefore when I use masculine or feminine I am not positing a definition of what masculine vs. feminine should be (how could I when, even in the strict confines of culture they overlap, extend, intersect, and defy constantly?) but rather the understood definitions of gender as “the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes”⁵ and the powerful influence on identity, specifically in reference to sexuality and in turn, desire.

Cixous often breaks down the lines between male and female so as to convey the deeply intimate connection between herself and others, specifically her lover in the book. She is overt and intentional about this when she uses statements like: “S/he loves madly. S/he loves madness. S/he loves the mad condition. S/he loves on condition of the absolute” (58). This entrance into the question of gender is the central crux of the first attempt to deconstruct identity.

⁵ See: Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*, pg. 10. I want to point out that Butler immediately goes on to contradict this assumed assertion of gender by saying “then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Take to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders,” but it is important to understand the working definition of gender so as to understand how to subvert it.

The purpose of my work engaging Cixous is not so much to rebel against being a woman (or a man) but to usurp the defining point of “womanhood”/“manhood” and to continue to bend. For there is no choice in how we are born. Neither pride nor prejudice for the status of one’s “gender”/“sex” is justified because it is thrust upon us at birth by naming, social context, social norm, birth certificates, clothing color, normalized behavior, not to mention biological “facts”. But to bend these norms, these “facts” and to allow the feminine/masculine to twist together so as to move outside of (most importantly) seeing ourselves in such a rigid and stagnant light, and to see the lack of fixity or permanence in our state is to be in a constant state of growth, and a constant state of growth pains. This is not an easy venture to embark upon. It is not easy to become so self aware that we clearly lose any essential self. It is humbling, awkward, and thorny. But, more importantly, it is expansive. And this is the value of the endeavor.

Chapter II: Memory

The second chapter temporarily diverges from the subject of gender to expand on the idea of comprehending the multiple within the self according to the other by critically looking at how memory intersects and mediates the present moment. In this chapter, I will be dissenting from Cixous’ theory that we cannot claim identity from any chronological place but the present; I argue instead that there is never a present moment, or identity within that present moment, without the influence and experience of the past. Cixous is often adamant about not dwelling on past experiences so that one is able to fully comprehend the present moment as an unmediated self. This philosophy, however,

is seriously undercut by her continued negotiation and reflection on past experiences. Specifically dominant in, but certainly not limited to *Love Itself*, remembering plays a vital role in Cixous' understanding of the love affair she writes in reference to *you*. This second chapter attempts to reexamine the present moment as continually mediated by past experiences, so much so that a present without a past is rendered unobtainable. Through this reasoning, (which can be seen as a horizontal attempt at identity that cannot be separated from a merging of past, present, and future) we see that identity is not only re-shaped in the moments of interactions with others but rather in every moment we are being shaped by past experiences, rememberings, and our multiple interpretations and applications of them. The present then is bent toward the past, toward the future. We see that it loses its fixed presentness and is chronologically pushed away from the essential and into the multiple which reflects the lack of a fixed essence and relates back to the lack of a fixed genre and moves toward a *queer ecriture*.

Chapter III: Queering

The third chapter is the attempt to reflect how the deconstruction of gender and of moment radically shifts any essential ways of knowing. Stepping past Cixous, past *ecriture feminine*, past the necessary moment and into an expansive and inclusive queer space, I call on the work of *Love Itself* to display a way to understand identity.

I respond to Cixous' list of conventional gender binaries in the first chapter, in the third chapter of my text draws on her attempts to create a bi-sexuality in both genders through the letter I. In this work I imagine a movement out of the regulated, capital-

driven world that rotates around binaries and hierarchies which still inhabit Cixous' *I* and into the expanded theory of *i*, which is a detailed look into the tiny and enormous power of language. This theory of *i* is an effort to make sense of Cixous' continued essentialization of women and men and to understand identity in the space of the multiplicity of each self. I point to the third chapter of this thesis to explain the distinction between *I* and *i* a bit further:

The *I* (in its aesthetic and capitalized power) is erect, phallic, and singular. It cannot penetrate the (bi) of Cixous' theory in this way. Thus I call for, instead of *I* –*i*. This *i* (which by the power of technology I am forced to go back and correct each time I write it) engages us in the revision of the normalized. Where *I* is power through capitalization and centrality, *i* is subversion, revision, re-vision.⁶

The crux of this chapter is the explosive break from any sort of essential, whether that “essential” be Cixous' “feminine” writing within her contradictory assertion that terms of gender are interchangeable, or the definition of queer within boundaries of gendered or other identified bodies. Rather, *i* takes the argument beyond Cixous limit of queer where any body can be in relationship (in any way) with any other body. This erupts the grid upon which we are measured because, in the words of Peggy Phelan, “in framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image of that other. Representation follows two laws: it always conveys more than it intends and it is never

⁶ See pgs 57-58.

totalizing” (Phelan, 106). If a thing is defined, definitively, then deviation from that definition by occupying multiple positions deconstructs the singularity of definition. There can be no inhabiting any one thing but only the inhabitation of a variety of things, only an inhabitation of lack of definitive space. Therefore everything – gender, desire, memory, language, genre – all non-normative, all queer. In Donald Hall’s short book that offers an introduction and explanation of queer culture, *Queer Theories*, he asserts that “queering” (in the sense I am using it in) “does pose a particular threat to systems of classification that assert their timelessness and fixity. It may not destroy such systems but it certainly presses upon them, torturing their lines of demarcation, pressuring their easy designations” (Hall, 14). This explanation moves beyond gender and into a space of all oppression or dominating main-stream culture. Then even queer, with its sexualized connotation, needs to shed a layer. To move away from demarcation and naming, even naming that seems to give power to one (and specifically women in Cixous’ assertion) is the only way to move away from understanding ourselves as different and, thereby, exclusive, for we cannot be exclusive when we are merely (infinitely!) a compilation of each other.

CHAPTER 1: *Masculine and Feminine/Notfear and Heart*

“It begins with fear. Because of absolute solitude.”

Cixous, *Love Itself*

It is hard for me not to start out with a question because all of my “starting outs” are from questions. Even if I started with a statement, it would be one of interrogation and confusion, if it weren’t, where would I have to go? Ha! There it is again, the question! So then, here it is: can we re(un)learn to see masculinity and femininity as characteristics outside of sexed bodies? And can these characteristics be laid upon or manifested in any body without negativity and shame? Can we locate a place in language where the essentialization of male/female, masculine/feminine can be so discussed, analyzed, and reevaluated that the “essence” wears down, the stereotype wears down, and the two can become many, where they can mix each other up and become something more. Perhaps I can get at this by renaming “masculine” and “feminine” (and here the quotations are already a kind of renaming) into *Notfear* and *Heart*. Although *you* (my own personal *you*) suggested that those are still gendered (and by this *you* meant degrading the ever powerful “masculine” in an attempt to gain ground for the “feminine” and in this degradation reaffirming the stereotypical) terms. But, I will try to affirm that *Notfear* is not a place of essentialized degradation and *Heart* not a place of essentialized exaltation. With eyes open to my place of marginalization and the effect that might have on my renaming, I am going to stay with these terms I gathered from Cixous and try to grow them here to see if they flourish in this soil. In *Love Itself* Cixous utters:

I am learning to live by heart.

“I am learning to live by heart”: I say this sentence to you on the telephone. You hear: “I am learning to live by fear.”

That’s us: heart and fear, *coeur* and *peur*, masculine and feminine (119).

Here I would like to set up a list so that Cixous’ somewhat jumbled association (and my use of these words) have a clear relation to each other:

Heart = feminine = *cœur*⁷

Fear = masculine = *peur*⁸

I make these equations because Cixous makes these equations with her own sense of identity in relation to the lover. She feels herself to be heart but thinks that he hears that she is in fear. She sets up the normalization or tendency of feminine to heart and masculine to fear. “Masculine” and “feminine” stereotyping having both outward (cultural, bodily) and inward (psychological, bodily) power to shape identity. If heart/emotion has circularity, then emotions are allowed to play on each other, off each other, move away and back toward each other. One emotion is never forgotten or given up completely but reshaped to each experience, each new moment. Fear, on the other hand, functions as a fixed and perpetual point that one (and in *Love Itself* specifically man/you) is always moving away from. There is not a multiplicity or scale of understanding or being with fear that can be called upon for different situations (because fear has a negative connotation where heart does not). It cannot be circular, then because

⁷ *Cœur*: meaning heart in french, although heart is a masculine word in the french language

⁸ *Peur*: meaning fear in french, although fear is a feminine word. (Cixous here points to the use of these words layered onto their opposite genders as a further deconstruction of gender itself.)

of that negativity. It is not a place that one longs or is allowed to long to return to but rather a fixed and straight line from experiences of Fear to existence in Notfear.

Though Cixous only speaks specifically to this reassignment of labels, she often illustrates how both fear (and its constant movement toward a place of notfear) and heart (emotion) motivate her. She also often sees the fear/notfear functioning in herself and in that recognition she begins to break down the line between herself and *you* and, further, between masculine and feminine as synonymously male and female. But even this attempt to break down the self/other dichotomy is infused with both the notfear and heart. Cixous is clearly and continually trying to understand identity—that thing which we are so hesitant to give weight to and yet weighs so heavily on our negotiation of positionality/frame of reference. In the beginning of *Love Itself*, Cixous muses, “We call ourselves: you, or else we. You, you, and we. Each time I say: we, I am afraid, I fear you and I fear fate. Who can swear to ‘we’? No one. ‘We,’ I say timidly and imprudently and I scrutinize your face to see if it’s OK” (3). She fears the acceptance of heart and yet her movement is back and forth from the fear. She is not moving in a clear line away from fear and toward notfear; otherwise, she would not be able to test her assertion of “we,” her re-assessment of her identity within the context of *you*.

Because so much of fear/not fear and heart reside within the felt experience of the two bodies (most often the two lovers) it is important to discuss Peggy Phelan. In her evocative article, “Broken Symmetries,” which considers the politics of identity, memory, and sexual difference, she contemplates identity. Phelan asserts that this identity is created in the actions or failure of actions to accurately portray self-hood in and of the singular body. She states:

Identity cannot [...] reside in the name you can say or the body you can see – your own or your mother's. Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other – which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being. (Phelan, 112)

In other words, it is not until we see ourselves against or in line with an(other) that we are able to assert identity. If this is true, however, it is the same for the other we are setting ourselves against and therefore they cannot assert his/her identity without us. We are then not so much in opposition as in need of each other to affirm the other. We are both real and not real, and because of this we are always and never each other's opposite. I muse in my own formation of identity within of without the gendered self:

Your pen is in my pen.

Does that make us men?

My tongue is in your space.

Does that make us women?

I think not.

I think we are pieces, tiny pieces

Spinning between each other

Creating the muchness

Tapping into it like sap from a tree.

So then, the binaries that we create are imagined (and, of course, significant). But by seeing their subjectivity we are able to negotiate their “strict” boundaries with play and liberty.

Cixous created a list of binaries in her essay *The Newly Born Woman*, written in 1975 and translated and published in the United States in 1986 which I am attempting to engage and critique in relation to the less overt gender play in *Love Itself*. Her argument is summarized as “tradition of gender representation as an oppositional one in which all that connotes women is portrayed as being secondary to male rationalist principles.” The list is as follows:

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress

Matter, concave, ground – where steps are taken, holding- and dumping-ground

Man

Woman (Cixous qtd. in *Anthology*, 348).

That line is the joiner/the separator, which is true of the couple because the couple is always dual. Through this coupling there is a recognition of the “we” Cixous is still occupied with in *Love Itself*, because the coupling is a rejection of all others (including one’s own identity as separate from that “we”). Through this coupling comes a solidarity but also a more complete estrangement. The more you know, the less you know. That identity settles into and “outto” the shape of a person. If land is woman and urban is man (and just by reversing their order – maybe I achieve something?) then the pairing of the two makes something new. New scape.

What kind of environment looks like the break down of

Man

Woman

?

and moves toward something more than its division.

To the roots I say. Each body: each set of hands, each whole and unwhole, each mind and spirit (not each man and each woman) may touch the earth. Let the earth touch them back. Plant and remain passive (which shows that the planter is not always the active). Harvest and enter a kind of beautiful violence with the willing land (which belittles and condemns the violence of body against body). Exit the market of anything at any price

and enter the priceless. Exit the oppositional list and enter the palpable intelligence of roots.

In her essay “The Traffic in Woman” which discusses women’s relationship to dominant leftist philosophies of the late 20th Century, Gayle Rubin muses, “The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love” (Rubin, in *Anthology*, 787). We cannot avoid the duality, the integration of the sides of Cixous’ lists into one another, even though we set them apart with a dividing line and hold to our sides and call them our identity, our selves. There is more androgyny than we care to see. Activity/passivity? Even in a sexual union these roles are reversed, intermingled. Even in the most passive position, a person must move to feel pleasure. Burrowed into this sexual relationship are both heart and fear, inextricably.

So why do we insist on the divide so fully? Vanity? Vanity. Cixous touches on the idea of she and her lover becoming one, or rather revealing that neither is one, but many, or nothing.

Cixous:

“I am terrified by our resemblance” says the letter of 25.12.68, and here I am terrified by the word resemblance, to whom to relate it, to *us* who, to whom does *our* belong, terrifyingly. Between *our* and *resemblance*: a hole, in the hole: the poor skull of resemblance. We resemble one another like brothers, like brother and sister, like near and fear. Fear to see my old fear flushed out, unearthed and my skull barriers crack (129).

Though Cixous is, once again muses about the non-fixedness of identity if one is ingrained with resemblance or “we”, she also points to (in this excerpt) the close relationship of near and fear and, in fact! perhaps recreates the binary of heart/fear into near/fear that can be more interchangeable within identity, so that they are not so much

Male/Female

Masculine/Feminine

Not Fear/Heart

(but rather)

Fear/Near

The shift in this structure of writing, the creating of new words, the showing how renaming has power to resee a layer of identity – this is a bend in genre/gender (how close these two words are aesthetically). The closeness/multiplicity of these words finally starts to diverge from our preconceived understanding of specific words onto specific “genders”. The synonymous impact of masculine/feminine into men and women is perhaps removed enough in the words near and fear that we are able to talk about each of these words (fear: straight line/driven/singular/forward) vs. (near: circular/repetitive/multiple/chaotic) can begin to invade and shift gender perspectives and ideals. We can begin to allow each of these ways of knowing to integrate identity, for if heart is circular and multiple and does not function in the straight line of fear to not fear, it cannot make any sort of steady movement out of the chaos. The fear/not fear stability

and direction complements heart by giving it purpose, and the heart/nearness compliments fear/not fear by multiplying and expanding the direction and possibility of being. Because these things are still in relationship to one another, they can never be fixed but rather only can function (though this has the possibility to be a large function) to advance diversity within imagined or real understanding of self.

Again, though, it is a difficult thing to move into a space of de-essentializing everything. Again, vanity, inability to let go of our “essential, innate uniqueness” plays a role. There is something to be said for being something fixed, unmoveable, and yet we move and re-shape at every moment and should find pride in that. Cixous calls on the smallest of words (it) to describe our anxiety over feeling without fixity. Cixous states, “How does *Ça* happen? Where does *Ça* live? Where does *Ça* hide. *Ça* does not want to die. *Ça* is an indefinite pronoun. You don’t know what you’re talking about when you say *ça*. *Ça* is not *ci*? *Ça* leaves. That doesn’t mean *ça* doesn’t come back” (45). And yet, in these words, *ça*/it seems to be the constant, the unnamable “essence” of anything moving through anything. We are defined by a multitude of its and yet we want to be more than their sum. But what else is there? Some floating *more-than-it* to be grabbed out there (wherever *there* is)? Why are we upset, but by the fact that we are a complicated, multiple, compilation of experiences, complicated by other experiences, unending, never settling, always reshaping and adapting?

And yet Cixous sees the power, or rather, the everything that dwells within such a small, yet such a great word. “At that moment the word *ça* grabs hold of my mind with an incredible force for such a little vocable. *Ça*: it, that, this, indefinite, nameless” (44). Nameless, indefinite, the place I am trying to get to and yet it seems empty somehow.

We want to be named, defined, understood because it is how we are affirmed as *being here*. If we cannot be defined, then we will not be recorded, documented, known. But that all is so fleeting to begin with. It goes so quickly, maybe a few thousand years at best and that's so miniscule compared with the expansion of *things*. So we turn away from *ça* and we turn toward *I am*. *I am woman*. *I am Caucasian*. *I am American*. *I am a writer*. *I am a daughter*. But the truth is, these things can shift in a moment too brief to notice. *I am a woman, defined by what? other women? My lovely (still lovely) cousin Erica is now Elijah, if she is no longer woman then I cannot say that I am like her and cannot say that woman is me*. *I am Caucasian and yet my blood runs full of native blood, African blood, blood I've never been made aware of*. *I am American, but I move from country to country and I do not have a national identity that can be understood or pinned down*. *I could move at any moment and my self wouldn't change because my location*. *Not right away at least*. *I am a writer, but when I stop writing I am not*. *I am a daughter, but when my parents die I am not*. But still we find pleasure, deep pleasure, in naming and so instead of allowing things, identities, desires to be larger than a name we confine them in because IT is degrading. The small word is for things, not people, but IT is not even enough for things.

What is more degrading than IT is to essentialize ourselves, to put ourselves in dichotomy and opposition to the relations around us, which constitute us. Instead we should be able to recognize each opposite in ourselves and in our other. Heart and Notfear function within me, and are real and imagined, and I embrace and reject that. If I can see myself as a being of multiple "genders" playing and redefining constantly, then perhaps the torment of woman is lessened. Cixous describes a woman she witnesses,

“The thrice-beautiful woman, by the way they speak of her I feel they are under her spell, if I were I man I would recognize her,” (8) but she does recognize her! and recognizes herself with the repeating I. So both are recognized by and for her and both are then confused into each other: I/her/woman/man. She continues, describing her recognition of her/I by herself/man, “I would be a little bald in appearance but my mouth would be open on a heart-shaped tongue, I would chuckle in delight, my eyes would split apart in the middle of my cheeks for my whole body would be lifted by the voice...” (8). If gender is created by the language layers that stack up upon the body, then by saying, “If I were I man” Cixous allows (and is allowed as is often the case in even less shrouded ways) herself to inhabit the being of a man. By this imagining she enters the “masculine” mentality that is clearly not fixed (or regularly unfixed in these ways). If we can so easily slip on the skin of another (or the gender signifiers: clothing, activity, voice level) and perform in such a way, then isn’t it logical, yes logical, to say that these skins are created, mitigated, used when needed, shed when needed, shaped, recreated, learned, experienced, but most certainly not fixed?

In this way some of our fear is relieved and can drop off the path to not fear to entertain thoughts that previously had to be shut out for both identity’s sake and the sake of maintaining the binaries. Cixous delivers a reality/imagined description of fear that describes how, either way, the implication of the experience holds the same effect.

...with such an energetic scenario such striking images that I bewitch myself into a state of terror-by-probability or verisimilitude that is equal to reality. The fear that this imagined scene might be true overcomes me, a poison of despair spreads throughout my body, I don’t move, I don’t dare undertake to verify if my fear is

real or if it remains confined in the horribly nearby realm of phantoms and nothing can undo the spell I have cast over myself, and which can take an altogether material form, except the apparition of the being who I am in the process of dying out of fear of losing, in flesh and blood, on the garden path, quite alive and whose miraculous view brings me back to life (133-134).

Cixous' writing from this place of "terror-by-probability" is not just imagining but reality. In this reality I find my own imagined terror, negotiated in sleep, so often too much to face upon waking.

An Experiencing Self

I dreamed that you left me for another, a slight man with light skin and a gentle touch (knowing that you say my touch is sometimes too much). You slept with him in a tall twin bed and I could see everything happening. I could feel how much you loved him, the way your skin reacted to his, your deep desire. I could see all this and feel all this and yet I was somehow physically removed so I could do nothing to stop the ache that permeated my body. When you told me this was love! you'd never known it before, I knew it was true by how far away you suddenly were, as if you had never been close, and yet the pain, my pain was nauseating. These phantom experiences, dreams, realities are so close to real realities not in action (for you have never been with another since you've been with me) but close to them in the way smell and experience are unexplainably linked within memory. This smell (this dream) is too close to feelings I won't allow in waking hours.

Fears I can't negotiate with eyes open. Fears I don't understand personified in a dream in a waif of a pale man.

My insecurity in the fixity of genders and desires is overtly at stake in this dream. It is as if someone molded it for me to see, to be forced to look at, to be forced to unravel and re-sew so that I could see a new you and a new me. It is all then a rebirth and I am sent into the body's (my body's) reaction to this thought. I bend out of the theory and into my own creative account.

An Experiencing Self

Suddenly, you are upon me like the scent of a new season. Your absence unrecognized until it is present again. I find it in unexpected places like memories and smells. We bought warm beverages and filled them with cream and honey and your arm was around me reaching for things as if I was a part of even this action, as if I was inextricably, instantly a part of your being. How did this happen? Was it the death between us for eight long weeks that caused this rebirth? This renewal? Like all things in the (re), it is as authentic as the first time because nothing is the first time and so everything is as new as the lack of newness is always being experienced through. It is the circling back that is so terrifying, so liberating. If everything is (re)done and (re)experienced and nothing is "authentic" then the death of anything is not so tragic, not so essential, because death itself is escaped. It is open ended, it is de-essentialized because there is not first, no last, no right and wrong, no life and death, but rather a twisted root of all and none in one.

Everything defining and un-defining each other by comparison. Without the death there is no life and so your arm around me is a reminder (both tortuous and spectacular) that we will always be dying and reborn at once.

This rebirth is thrilling in its ability, not to change us physically but to reassess our physicality in the world. Our movement in the world. Our understanding of identity, both male and female, both oppositional and exchangeable. Each time I bend this space of language I defy fixity, I enter into a fantasized space where I am perhaps gendered only by my choice, and in that choice a multiplicity of genders. If we can see past the loss of fixed identity and look upon identity rather as always in motion, then we can be released from what Cixous writes when she witnesses two people, a young man and woman interacting on the street and states, “He’s the one, the young soldier, who is afraid. . . What makes him afraid is the enormity of the life that looks at him immobile” (16). The soldier allows himself (or it is thrust upon him for unknown reasons but one can assume that he has seen both “good” and “evil” in both sides of whatever war he has been a part of) to understand that life, which was once steady and sure is now so much more, so enormous. No longer immobile, but continually mobile, there is an unseen pleasure in this, most commonly blinded by fear and confused by heart. However, when we see that even fear/not fear and near/heart are simply constructions to aid us in this discovery of self/undiscovery, then the greater question of how to live well with this new analysis is posited. Is this a true liberation that we can embrace positively, with pleasure, or is the enormity and simplicity of “liberation” a space we should fear? If we move

away from binaries or rather one or the other perhaps we can ask the question with a more critical and more liberated eye.

Then, who deserves pleasure and how does one go about moving within the fear to find it, to inhabit that space of enormous pleasure? Cixous seems to call to the woman who, writing and reforming in the *écriture féminine* can more freely play. If we conform to the binaries and the rule of provider/receiver, then certainly the woman above the man deserves pleasure given to her by the man. *And yet! during the coupling of the two we see that is not so. It is the man who is guaranteed the gift of pleasure (though maybe his is less because it is irrevocably about economy – to provide his seed, his production). Pleasure for the dreamy sake of pleasure he cannot find he cannot achieve because there is no “achievement” in it. It is moment. Not economy, not production, not future plans and savings accounts and investments. Only moment.*

Now woman, though she is not “guaranteed” the pleasure, holds the sweetness of spreading nothing, producing nothing by her lovely climax. On its own, with herself, she wastes nothing, wants nothing. She does not need the product of the marketable man to illuminate her, nor does she spill her own commodity with orgasm. It is only pleasure, awake and aware of its own simplicity. How complex!

But as we re-read these last pages it is easy to notice that these simplified versions of coupling cannot compete with the ever re-negotiated self-hood. A sexual coupling can never be the same twice, and so can never be fixed. And so this stereo-typical assertion of man’s pleasure vs. women’s pleasure can be re-seen through man entering woman, woman entering man. Tangibly, this can be difficult to grasp and Cixous states that in the most basic ways, the challenge of being obscured into the couple, losing one’s identity,

reasserting the estranging, intimate identity of the “coupled self” can be tortuous. I think of my own coupled self too, which, in all its expansion I often want to shrink from. I think of how much I am hurt by this coupling.

An Experiencing Self

You said once that I don't trust you. Do you know why? It is because of the swiftness of your changes. At one moment you have me pinned in the corner of the kitchen, your body all in motion, in motion toward me around me concerning me. And then suddenly you are still as a cup. Your body, motionless save for the lip you are biting and your eyes which move furtively over what you are consumed by. In no way can I penetrate that stillness, not with my voice, or my body, or my will. So often today you asked me, “what?” when I glanced your way, as if even that small attempt to be in your quiet space was an abrasion you felt acutely. There is no reason it seems, no reason for this swift shift. Not one I can tell, not one you can tell. I am left to quiet my own eyes, my own self, and keep my trust contained.

While I am hurt, I am also unhurt. Why else would I endure? But Cixous states, poignantly on the ever renegotiated distinction of self and couple, “It is horribly difficult to send one another/oneself and receive letters that are so threatening for the spirit's soul, the heart's soul, the life's soul, the soul of things, in the absence of fright. Still today I wonder why you sent them to me. Was it in order to say to me; ‘It is not I who write these letters. It is you?’” (35).

I think that it is important to make a distinction at this point that while these “features” of the other can (and often do) and often should be inhabited by the self, it is impossible to be the other because we are so much of so many others. How can we ever be one? It is the moment that we are in contact with another, the moment that we are continually renegotiating what it is to be “male” or “female”, the moment that we are standing in front of an(other) and determining our self that we continue to shift. This is the unending motion that is not a becoming of the other but a redefining of self in comparison of the other. It can be a parallel or an opposition or most likely a suturing of both.

An Experiencing Self

You react to me so fully I wonder what bounds my control has — if only I could reign it in and not react to you? When I move from me/you, you move from me/you. When I say sweet things and call you near you say sweet words and hold me near. All this power and yet you hold it too and I wonder then if it's power or energy that reverberates between us and we/I can only try to shape it amidst the other/you trying to too. We can only negotiate which is more important on one particular day: me or you. Today it is me. And so I sit liberated on the bed with the keys under me and you stand in the darkness by the fire on this winter night making dinner.

The imagined and the real have been deconstructed throughout these pages, and the conclusion that this process brings me to is that the imagined space

of identity and gender and desire construction is as important as reality. They are one in the same. What we believe is what is. So it is that Cixous is able to write:

I love Proust I would say for the way he pulls back the curtains during the pretence, the way he plunges his soul into the mire, before witnesses, the way he loves to love love like a pig, people would say to me: pooh.

You're mad! They couldn't say to me: it is forbidden to show the truth because officially there was only truth that was in truth lies and hypocrisy.

I came "from the other side of the water," they said, but who made you judges that this side is here and that side is there? I would say. But I secretly preferred to be taken for a being from the other side with the truth on my side that they called madness and to leave on their side the usurpation become reasonable according to their illusion (55).

Cixous embraces her "madness" because she believes that the "other side" is liberation from the expected self which always reiterates the past experience, who always performs sanity. Once again, it is not so much that man becomes woman and woman becomes man but that the words that imply man and woman come into a kind of imagined madness where they are liberated from concrete and stunting essentialization. It is not about the

Male

Female

but rather the fe within the male the male within the fe, the redefining and expanding of the imagined/real two.

The clarity that witnessing, that seeing, that imagining another in another in the self makes the two not one but many and many and many, the fixed object boundlessly in motion, always seeking a better position, a new definition of

Male

Female

(perhaps in)

fear/notfear

heart/emotion/near

some attempt (because we see now that the attempt is the realization and bending of the imagined/real reality) that liberates us from necessitating the essential in the gendered identity.

What is ultimately important in this analysis of gender and identity in Cixous' work (and in my work involving Cixous) is to see the disintegration of the gender binary, of any essential and ultimate male/female through the "masculine"/"feminine." A person interacting with the world, with people and things and energy of the world in the present moment is continually being re-defined by whatever interaction they are having. Whomever they come in to contact with shifts their perspective in large and small ways

but there is inevitably a shift. The person cannot be defined without something to define against. Then we can see that identity, specifically a strict gender identity is certainly deconstructed.

CHAPTER 2: *The Present (Re)Memory*

“Who keeps the best? The being who keeps or the being who forgets?”

– Cixous, *Love Itself*

In the following chapter I will temporarily divert my thesis away from the argument based in the deconstruction of gender to look closely at another space of deconstruction functioning in Cixous’ work in expanding multiplicity in identity – the moment. This is not to assert that gender and present are not deeply connected – gender is continually being reestablished and layered upon. However, I want to give my full focus to the subject of that moment of reshaping identity and so I depart temporarily from the topic of gender in an overt way. But gender, like other defining identifiers is always present in how one interacts in this moment and so toward the end of the chapter I will pair the two to expand and multiply Cixous’ (and my own) theory of identity.

Mairead Hanrahan addresses Cixous’ preoccupation with memory when she writes in her article “Oubliere: Cixous’s Poetics of Forgetting,” “for an author renowned both for challenging the referential function of language and for her ongoing preoccupation with writing the present, memory plays an unexpectedly prominent role in Hélène Cixous’s writing” (Hanrahan, 1). While the specific text Hanrahan addresses is not the one I am focusing on, this statement arguably rings true for Cixous’ work as a whole. Even though she states, “My kingdom is the instant. . . I always work on the present passing” (Cixou, xxii, *Reader*), Cixous is actually quite preoccupied with memory, not with the “instant” or the “present,” so much that I would venture to say it is

central to *Love Itself*. Each chapter is shaped around remembering and while Cixous seems to be wary of recognizing this, like the scar from a pock in childhood, it shows physically through her language. I do not fault Cixous for avoiding such an inescapable idea that present is never without past, for it is a frightful thing to think about, and it challenges any idea that we at some point experience the world unmediated. Nay, it instead insists that we are never without a multitude of influences both in other people surrounding and interacting with us (and all of their memories) and our own vast set of memories. Hanrahan furthers the argument that remembering (and its direct connection into our present acting) shifts our understanding of identity:

Remembering, then, is not the same as telling the truth. First, the passage of time has irremediably altered the subject of remembrance. . . there is no such thing as an extratemporal subject, the illusion of a stale identity created by the first person pronoun is precisely an illusion. Second, there is no such thing as an impersonal or an extrapersonal memory. All memories are first-person memories, and subject therefore to the same perspectival bias as all other kinds of enunciation (Hanrahan, 3).

Hanrahan uses the word perspective which is of value when thinking about memory both within many individual persons remembering and within the realm of alternative rememberings within one person according to her/his continuing experiences. The vitality of memory in understanding the self (and here I dissent from Cixous) should not be seen as any type of degradation to identity. As Peggy Phelan proclaims, “an imagined history and a history of a real ocular experience have similarly weighted consequences for the

psychic subject” (Phelan, 108). However, as much as I am advocating understanding ourselves as fully mediated through our own past experiences, I will admit that there is something disenchanting about exposing all of our experiences (which feel fully original) as mediated by the experiences of those surrounding us and presumably by the past. None the less it is important to move past the disenchantment and into the excitement of a potentially more aware sense of identity.

All of the time (I hope not all of the time!) there won’t be anything but (re)actions. Nothing truly new, but rather a series of setting ourselves either in opposition or as mirror images to what is around us. (Re)⁹: already done/experienced, only a (re)affirmation of what is around us, what can be known, what can be (re)alized as (re)ality. Throughout *Love Itself*, Cixous is reanalyzing her identity, most specifically in relationship to the great *you* of the book. But her attempt to escape the importance of memory as an inextricable part of her identity both past present and future inhibits her from really seeing her memories as vital. Instead she tries to escape them and is therefore stuck replaying them because there is no embrace of their permanence. Cixous states:

I try to (re)capture exact details in the flesh but I can’t picture the place (re)mains
you say,

⁹ Re: “a prefix, occurring originally in loanwords from Latin, used with the meaning ‘again’ or ‘again and again’ to indicate repetition, or with the meaning ‘back’ or ‘backward’ to indicate withdrawal or backward motion” (dictionary.com)

The scene-that-(re)mains one day you were (re)turning from vacation I fell upon
you we made love on the floor I (re)member the texture of your skin you say
which saddens me (re)mains the texture (1).¹⁰

Here is where my point comes home. Everything we say/experience/know is infused with the (re), the past, the other knowledge that is outside ourselves, but that becomes ourselves. Cixous', our, insistence then that we are able to be entirely in the present when the memo(re) is constantly negotiating the moment, falls away from truly seeing, falls away from a hope for the higher self, the more present self. It is only through this recognition of the pastpresent as always and at once informing and shaping each decision, which is always already past, that we begin to allow the misconception that we are somehow original and not copies of cultural norms/rejections of cultural norms/copies of cultural norms that there may be space to become original in some smaller but more authentic way. Most simply put: pastpresent is the realization that every "present" moment is always mediated by past experiences.

So we make an effort to understand how pastpresent is created and functioning as part of our identity and movement in the world. It is important to rethink memory outside of the mind and to know it as bodily. Memory mediates everything we come in contact with. Maidread Hanrahan in speaking of Cixous' work states, "on the sixtieth as on the ninth reading, the book is as new. It is memory's ability to lock events away in an 'armoire,' that enables the past to recur, to happen again. In other words, memory is not just the recollection of events; it is an event" (Hanrahan, 2). Hanrahan states that each time we re-read Cixous we extract something new, and in that extraction we are not only

¹⁰ Parentheses added by me to the original text

reliving it from the past but from what is now our present. We cannot analyze it in the same framework that we had in the moment the event (the reading) occurred and so it is not the same event. Remembering is a different event that is happening in the pastpresent.

Without memory, we would be babies, unable to deal with our circumstances in any capacity. Phelan states, “One’s own origin is both real and imagined. The formation of the ‘I’ cannot be witnessed by the ‘eye.’ The primal scene itself is (probably) a screen memory for the always-lost moment of one’s own conception” (Phelan, 108). Phelan is stating that our “origin,” our identity is both real and imagined and cannot be understood outside of that “always-lost moment” that so informs our understanding of both self and other. That real and imagined pairing cannot be unpaired. Memory is so much a part of our identities. Memory is, essentially, (gulp, for using that word!) our identities (and when I get fixated on “identities” it is with full knowledge and emphasis that they are created entities but created with such power that they are more than worth discussing) because we have no reference without them. No experience, no other to set ourselves against and see that we are opposite because of the opposite. No way to name and to separate, no knowledge that there are millions like us and no knowledge that we are different because we have had “different” experiences. No way to know that what we do/feel/think is in any way “right.” Without memory there is no reference. There is no self because there is no other. What a radical, chaotic, terrifying existence to have no one reaffirm your sameness.

Excuse my tongue in cheek and understand that I think there is something beautiful in a memory, but that, as Cixous claims, I see the danger in the memory. The

danger of allowing ourselves to be consumed by the past and to thereby be stunted in growing into the future, or rather by simply being in the present. But where Cixous will not allow herself to see that she uses/is used by memory constantly, I am pointing to it as a thing to recognize and reckon with. She is in fact preoccupied with memory (though she claims to want only to live in the present) and we see this continually in her work. In the beginning of the book she addresses “you” who she is most specifically in memory/in love with. At this point she is remembering a conversation they are having and yet it is clearly digressing into (at least partially) a memory of her own thoughts which is her interpretation of the past and not (anymore) the “authentic” event. She states:

And if you didn’t remember them? They would die.

You can forget or not forget, I don’t want to exercise over you the right of evocation.

—Let me do it, I’m the head.

—You’re the head of *forget-and-remember*. My memory is not as valiant as yours. But I live in my memory. Our memory has two forgettings. You come into my hut. I go into your memory. Each one at home at the other’s

“I let you do it, I let myself be led along I let you make me me I say, as much as it can be done and as possible as it is possible to will – but not always” (5-6).

Besides being so clearly self reflexive in a memory which is conversational, she recognizes that there is forgetting within remembering and that this forgetting is part of our analysis of the memory and therefore of our identity. It is what we choose to include that creates the direction of our experience in our present. We present the past in specific ways in the present; this process is described by Hanrahan when she discusses the letters exchanged with her father that Cixous re-reads and remembers, “the question of memory is the most obvious link: the return of the letters is similar to the return of a forgotten memory in that both create the impression of re-presenting the past” (Hanrahan, 3). Cixous is attempting to reform her memory according to her present.

This attempted reformation leads to the question of how we come to know ourselves and the experiences of the world that are ourselves. It is by rereading, rethinking, reviewing, rewriting. This is how we make memory our own, how we internalize it, how we come to inhabit and identify within remembered experiences and how they comes to inhabit us. Phelan states, “the primal scene is remembered and (re)visited through the dream and the symptom – through the imaginative attempt of the unconscious to replay the (past) scene on the stage of the present. Self-identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured precisely because it fails to secure belief” (Phelan, 108). She gives weight (deservedly and precisely) to the (re) and I would argue to the lack of identity without it.

When we are first exposed to and exposed by something we can’t comprehend it. Like looking at a tree so close that all we see are the colors, all we know is the smell, and that is only sharp because it instantly brings us to another thing, the memory of another thing. But by stepping back from that tree we begin to see bark, knots in the trunk,

branches in obscure positions, branches reaching up and out, wet with the morning, we relook, resee and can say, this is not only color and smell and texture. We can name it, know it, (re)ference it, once again. The power lies in seeing that we are reseeing and in that way seeing. Nothing is understood without the multiplicity of pastpresent.

My great difficulty: everywhere that we have lived together the place has become ours. I cannot return there without him, without complications, without damages, without grief, without joys. The balance between the winds of passion is necessary but miraculous. I can no longer go to New York without him, I cannot go there sometimes with him, sometimes without him. New York retains one of our lives that if we didn't go visit it would end up by drying out. We can't leave lives forever with re-lives (131).

While Cixous advocates for moment, moment is intersected here (as everywhere) both in place and selfhood by past experience. These formative trips to New York cannot be negotiated without "him." He has become the landscape of the city, the emotional pull of the place. If he cannot be pulled out of her perspective of the place, then he is New York and New York is him. In this way she illuminates the formulative connection we have to the experiences we have had. We cannot stand alone and original, but are rather created by the choices (or the "choices") that have been thrust upon us so completely that we do not see that we are a mosaic, created and pieced together, not essentially any one thing but a building space in which we continue to reestablish and redefine and reify "our selves." Memory is reality because it shapes our perspective. What else is there but

perspective, outlook, identity, action? All of these things are relative and shifting and real at once.

—You remember what? I say.

—It was the end of summer you were returning I threw myself upon you, I will never forget this is the first time I tell you this memory, you say.

Each time it/she returns to him, it's the first time, the mystery of this scene is its power to return to him each time for the first time.

The power and the reliving and the reknowing of this scene create the idea that the memory is not simply a past experience, but rather new and in the moment and real each time. Even the smallest moments of remembering shape our selves. Cixous follows in this vein when she narrates:

Little by little this scene, the unique one, and its scene of repetition take on grandeur, little by little the scene and its second time are elevated to the sacred. Repetition adorns it with adoration. The little scene is now one of the greatest scenes in our book

I never say: you told it to me, remember, in the Japanese restaurant.

Never! That would be our suicide (4).

Here, clearly, is the importance of the remembering. The life of it. Cixous states that without the remembering and the retelling their relationship would not exist. So too then

the individual identities of the relationship for they have nothing to create themselves against. It is not so much that the story means something in terms of the actual actions of the event, but how their remembering sustains the two.

It is horribly difficult to send one another/oneself and receive letters that are so threatening for the spirit's soul, the heart's soul, the life's soul, the soul of things, in the absence of fright. Still today I wonder why you sent them to me. Was it in order to say to me; "It is not I who write these letters. It is you?" (35).

There is such an intentional confusion of self/other that occurs within this difficulty of challenging the self. Of seeing that other/self are present/not present, real/imagined. If we cannot ever fully extract ourselves from the other than anything that threatens us (whether it is our creation or not) is our own threatening. What does it mean then when we allow ourselves to continue living with poor choices (either mine or yours)? Aren't these choices, either way, our own? Maybe the shift comes when I see and say the things that threaten me. I wrote a letter once (more than once) to you (the one I love) and this letter threatens me because you didn't know how much it meant. This letter is my own letter (which Cixous sparked) that makes my spirit, heart, and soul, and the soul of things quiver with wanting to not see, lays down its guilt heavy upon me, though I wish to blame you. I'll write the story that I have never spoken:

A Remembering Self

I remember giving you a card for no special reason that was so beautiful that I wanted it for my own and maybe it was my own. I remember looking at it and knowing that it was love (this thing I was buying: which made me sad and honest at once). This thing I was buying but that was love to you and that I felt was worth my work/money/sacrifice so that you would know in colors that I hadn't arranged myself, and words I hadn't written either that I love you. And so what if I hadn't arranged and written them myself? What was myself in the first place but a compilation of beautiful and terrible things I had claimed as mine that weren't mine. So this compilation buys something for another compilation to say something that maybe tries to get at the kernel of truth that is this thing inside. I've thought about it so long, looked at so much, finally decided, checked out, handed over the money, heard the ding! of the vintage register, walked out of the store into the park, pulled out the pen and written my "own" words in what might be a step closer to the kernel, licked the triangle of the envelope, enveloped that kernel into something neat and lovely for you and placed it on your desk. Hoping that you know it is love itself.

I remember you said nothing after it had been opened. Perhaps you thought something, perhaps even the kernel I was hoping for, arose to you on that folded page, through the colors and words not my own, and the words that were my own. Perhaps you felt what I had meant for you to feel. But you said nothing. The days swept by and a few weeks later, I saw that card, so beautiful, I'd wanted it for myself, that sacrifice to you so that you would know the things that cannot be said by saying them, buried under papers and discarded junk mail, only the corner of it peeking out, the line of ink drawn under

your name, my only signature left. I remember knowing how little, how much, that meant, and looking away.

I think that if this story is mine and not mine and yours and not yours than I can say that it is real and not real and something about that lightens it. I do not have to give so much weight to it but can share it in its multiplicity and recognize the intersection between representation and reality. Phelan comments:

‘As Judith Butler points out, the confusion between the real and the representational occurs because “the real is positioned both before and after its representation; and representation becomes a moment of the reproduction and consolidation of the real” (“Force and Fantasy”: 106). The real is read through representation, and representation is read through the real. (Phelan, 106).

It has seemed so heavy; the memory as ever present, ever living, never escapable, always ourselves and not ourselves and yet there is a lifting of weight to think of it as not so fully our own but the way cultures are created, the themes of our understanding of the world. It gives me space to look at it, not so specifically personally but to be able to see why such a gesture of love scared a man who grew up with a quiet mouth in a quiet house. A man who knew what it was to be a man, who knew that it was a reigning in of feelings, a discarding of gestures which pull us off balance, a movement out of fear, not back into it. It lightens the story to see the letter/love in an expansive way, a thing never free of memory, of experience, of created identity. It forces a space that feels more free to

recreate again so as to push against the total submission of formation. To see the formation and to interrogate it.

Experience/memory through this lens becomes negotiable, even just so far as it can be seen and navigated in smaller ways, in ways that allow us to move away from fixed understandings of a thing and into a more multiple reality where there is no *one* way, *one* experience, but rather many ways that get recreated and reunderstood each time they have influence through retelling or reacting. In her essay “Experience,” in which the subjectivity of experience is revealed by describing the historian’s own personal experience, Joan Scott asks questions about the certain bias of the recorder of experience and the authenticity of the experience itself. She writes:

How can we historicize ‘experience’? How can we write about identity without essentializing it? Answers to the second question ought to point toward answers to the first, since identity is tied to notions of experience, and since both identity and experience are categories usually taken for granted in ways that I am suggesting they ought not to be (Scott, 33).

If we are to stop essentializing identity and to move into a more multiple understanding of identity and reality, then experience must be seen as continually mitigated, never pure or unfiltered.

In her book *Gynesis*, which focuses on the concepts and issues of modernity and literature in contemporary French thought, Alice Jardine states, “According to the philosophers and founders of rhetoric, experience is as mute and passive as are the

fragments of the real that remain beyond the *technē*, outside of the creative process. Experience can be brought to *expression* (idealism) or turned into *practice* (dialectical thought), but in and of itself, without mediation, it remains passive” (Jardine, 74). Experience means nothing without our mitigation and our mitigation queers any reality that could be said to be “authentic” or “essential.” Experience is contingent upon memories and past experiences which were contingent upon memories and past experience. From the time we are born we are shaped and essentialized in ways that we could not then and almost certainly cannot now comprehend fully. Scott goes on to use an excerpt from Stuart Hall’s work *Minimal Selves* which I would also like to employ: “The fact is ‘black’ has never been just there. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall, in Scott, 45). Hall’s statement resonates in racial studies, which has a different history altogether than gender studies and I do not mean to use them as easy parallels. However, I do wish to employ Stuart Hall’s use of the unstable identity. “Black” cannot be replaced with “woman” or “queer” or “native.” But, it can be said that while on a practical and cultural level these identities function vastly throughout our lives, they need to be negotiated with a sense of understanding their unstable, every changing implications. Any marginalized and fetishized identity “has never been just there” (Hall, 35). It is the constant need to reaffirm that marginalization or that fixedness of the otherness that does not allow for a renegotiation of the multiplicity within each identity, the infusion of constructedness behind each “authentic” choice and experience of our lives. As Scott says near the end of

her essay, “Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation” (Scott, 37).

Cixous inhabits this reshaping remembering when she writes, “But we have always changed days of mourning into days of joy, our presence being the response par excellence of resurrection to misfortune. I am looking for neither an excuse nor a cause. I am depicting the circumstances and their incalculable ways of continuously turning upside down downside up” (*Love Itself*, 134-135).¹¹ The turning of circumstances is one of the powerful aspects of memory but also an enlightening theory to contemplate. If we have the ability to reconstruct a past event, then isn’t that recreated event more authentic despite its “falsehood” because it is the living, moving event, the one that is still making its way into our self and our existence? Phelan states, “As a representative of the real the image is always, partially, phantasmatic. In doubting the authenticity of the image, one questions as well the veracity of she who makes and describes it. To doubt the subject seized by the eye is to doubt the subjectivity of the seeing ‘I’” (Phelan, 106). Phelan says that our identities are subject to our own imagined identity of our selves, implying that each experience we have and each new memory that experience creates are not fixed but rather are continually reshaping to suit our ever changing present. If we decide that we are in a different emotional state three years after a lover leaves us than we were at the moment of the leaving, then the event is no less real but rather has a different influence over our identity. We claim the memory as something other than it was because we have found a new lover and to recognize the agony of the loss of the other is a betrayal to the

¹¹ Cixous. From the chapter: “On February 12, I Committed an Error”. As another note, I would like to point to title of this chapter as a fixation with a specific event that occurred at a specific time. This kind of obsession with pointed experience/memory is a recurrent theme in *Love Itself* and reifies the concept of Cixous’ unclaimed emphasis on memory as her life. Writing itself is never the present (time) emotion but rather a remembering of a present (important) emotion. She is always, then, functioning in memory.

body in bed beside me now. The memory is reconstructed as I reconstruct myself. The essential quality of identity is lost and I am no longer one. This doesn't have to tear me apart or destroy me, rather if I can recognize my duplicity in this memory, my inevitable multiplicity upon multiplicity, I can find a kind of peace in knowing that I will never again be one and the anxiety of trying to be one lightens. Cixous states, "what we do or don't do depends on the times as if we were reciting a *prayer*," (136) a prayer to call upon like our lived history, something we "instinctually" know and are reciting and yet holding the feeling of authenticity and effort in the negotiation of our lives. The shift into admitting construction, reconstruction allows the quiet man to speak, to reenter the fear and to circle back to emotions that have been withheld for so long. To unbury the letter and enter the threat/liberty of words.

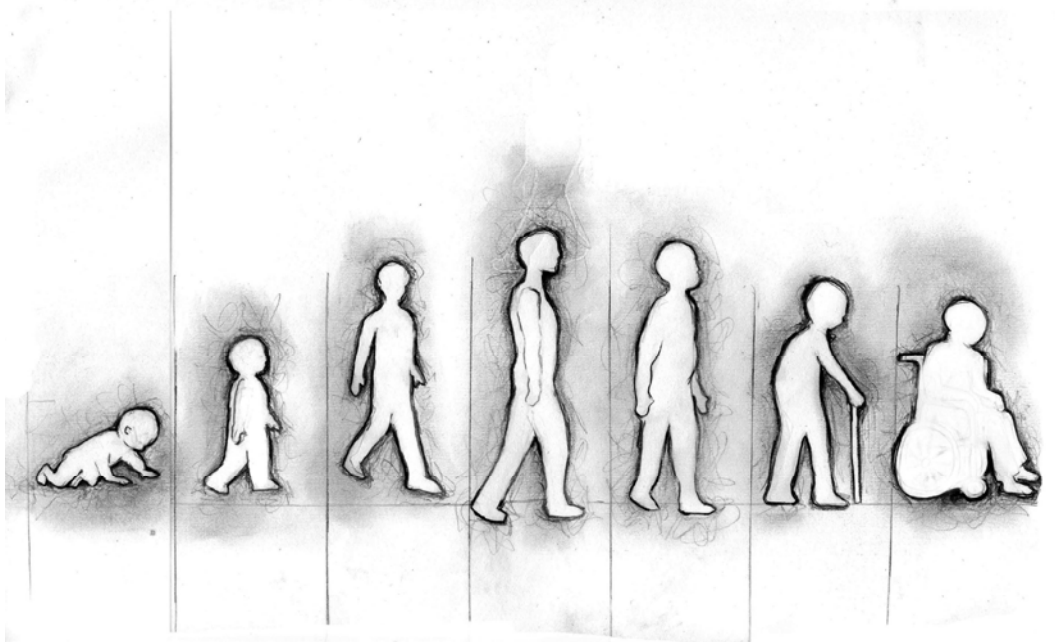
What is ultimately at stake in the analysis of memory and identity in Cixous' work (and my work with Cixous) is the de-essentialization of not only identity in the present as was discussed in the first chapter but also an acknowledgment of the inability to separate one's self from the history of selves. If gender binaries are deconstructed by the continual present moment forcing us to redefine our own gendered and relational identities, then historical identities (the historical memories that create the "essence" of who we are and why we act the way we do, the things we take for granted as just being "who we are") are deconstructed as well, for they are simply a series of pastpresent interactions that shaped how we handle the "present" interactions. The idea of "present" then loses its total value and we are able to see the weight of the building blocks of relational definition that truly *construct* our identity.

CHAPTER 3: *Hetero/Normalized/Generic vs.*

Queer/Madness/Genre Bending

An analytical look at Cixous' work in shifting gender binaries and a critical look at her work with present/memory has revealed the need for deconstruction of notions of gender and time that persist in her work, which create what we come to think of as a fixed identity. If a person interacting in the present moment is redefined each moment that person can be seen as (somewhat) unchanging physically, that moment (while they are undergoing cultural change and or redefinition of self with whomever that person is interacting with) can represent a vertical deconstruction.

On the other hand, the deconstruction of a person's identity according to memory/history is one that involves great physical change and will continue this way until death. The changes are not set concretely in the present but rather the pastpresent and therefore can be represented in a horizontal manner. In the work *Différance*, Derrida states, "Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on that stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element." This reiterates the idea that the present is a staged place in which both the past and the future act as mediators.



In this image, we see the physical change through the history or “experience” of our lives as horizontal. This vertical and horizontal representation (and know that it is indeed a representation for the sake of visualizing the abstract theories of the thesis) comes to fruition in this last chapter through which, if both the vertical and the horizontal are deconstructed, the idea of a fixed grid is deconstructed itself. The layers of this deconstruction have built to this point (some of this explicitly written and some of them covert) not so much the words, but rather the play of the larger, unpinnable language. Here is where the theory finally moves into the truly multiple, into what I am calling the queer – by moving away from strict theories of the sexualized queer.

Diane Griffin Crowder posits a wariness of the French feminists because of their essentialization in her essay “From the Straight Mind to Queer Theory: Implications for Political Movement,” which speaks to the feminist movement of the last forty years, most

specifically in regard to the body and the written body. She focuses her argument on the question of whether or not “difference” politics can have any real social impact because it reaffirms difference and therefore cannot move toward something more than division. At one point toward the end of the article, she summarizes Iris Young, stating that she “has cogently argued that as movements of social critique, feminism and queer theory must account not only for ‘individual experience, subjectivity, and identity, but also [for] social structures’ that limit access to the power to express one’s subjectivity” (Crowder, 498). By recognizing the need to change the structure of society, it is then difficult for me to understand how Crowder can be opposed to trying to re-write the language that dominates that society. However, I do agree with her when she states, “We need, in short, a politics in which one can strive to refuse to play the game, not just aspire to play it another way” (Crowder, 499). I simply think that playing with language to eliminate essentialized identity is a more productive system than remaining/playing within gender politics to change language. In an assessment of the French-American feminist movement at hand, Domna Stanton summarizes the movement and reaffirms this emphasis on language when she states, “women’s oppression, or more precisely, our repression, does not merely exist in the concrete organization of economic, political, or social structures. It is embedded in the very foundation of Logos, in the subtle linguistic and logical process through which meaning itself is produced” (Stanton, 73). Word cannot be separated from meaning and therefore cannot be separated from implication and identity. Cixous states, I don't "begin" by "writing": I don't write. Life becomes text through my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire, inscribe it [the text] in my body... (Cixous, “La Venue a l'écriture,” 57). It is therefore not simply

“playing the game,” as Crowder states, to shift the way we think about language, but a restructuring of the social which she is so passionately advocating, it is a moving out of *écriture feminine* and into a *queer écriture*.

Cixous often displays this expansion of language on the pages of *Love Itself*. She deconstructs and queers the notion of language when she recalls:

—“All the same, this is not going to last forever” he thinks, in French. But his caresses say the opposite.

He thinks that the being other thinks: forever.

...He is so jealous of his freedom. But which one? Whose freedom? All of a sudden he has the anguished thought that he has advanced too far into the desert: in the solitary and burning golden sands he can no longer see the frontier separating freedom from slavery. It seems to him there is none.

So? (17).

This interaction between Cixous and her lover touches on both the multiplicity of language itself and the multiplicity of identity. Cixous confuses the imagined and/or realized assertion that the man is conveying to her. His thoughts of temporary love are confused with both the imagined and/or realized touch which says the opposite. In this way both Cixous’ and the man’s utterance/lack of utterance moves outside of the space of confinement and is understood through the writing of them on the page. In *Gynesis*, Jardine explains of language’s necessary expansion:

To give new language to these other spaces is a project filled with both promise and fear, however, for these spaces have hitherto remained unknown, terrifying, monstrous: they are mad, unconscious, improper, unclean, non-sensical, oriental, profane. If philosophy is truly to question those spaces, it must move away from all that has defined them, held them in place: Man, the Subject, History, Meaning. It must offer itself over to them, embrace them (Jardine, 73).

Jardine is stating that it is vital to give up the previously assumed spaces which held the import of language and to move into their opposite so as to allow language to move without confinement, without prejudice for the powerful.

In the words of Derrida, “I SHALL SPEAK, THEN, OF A LETTER—” (Derrida, in *Anthology*, 280). Cixous attempts to move out of that confinement in *The Newly Born Woman* and calls to the bisexual, the I. “There is no invention of any other I, no poetry, no fiction without a certain homosexuality (the I/play of bisexuality) acting as a crystallization of my ultrasubjectivities. I is this exuberant, gay, personal matter, masculine, feminine or other where I enchants, I agonizes me” (Cixous qtd. in *Anthology*, 351). This I however, in its theoretic solidity, cannot help entrenching itself more heavily into the masculine than the feminine. The I (in its aesthetic and capitalized power) is erect, phallic, and singular. It cannot penetrate the (bi) of Cixous’ theory in this way. Thus I call for, instead of I – i. This i (which by the power of technology I am forced to go back and correct each time I write it) engages us in the revision of the normalized. Where I is power through capitalization and centrality, i is subversion, revision, re-vision.

Phelan states, “I take as axiomatic the link between the image and the word, that what one can see is in every way related to what one can say” (Phelan, 106) and so to

understand my engagement with the tiny word I/i is to understand that it is no less important than engaging the being of i. So then, to re-see Cixous' evocative I, her attempt at a complete being, which speaks to the bi and the multiple, the sexual and the coupled couple is to shift the ideas into a letter which makes (even) aesthetic sense, I is agonizing *but i is in motion toward peace, toward roots. Look at that line with its small orb above it. It is the animal reaching toward the sun. It is the image of female anatomy and at the same time the image of male and female together, which is not one set against the other but a multiplying, layering lack of one or the other. It is the bud and the root. It is the self and the other. It is independence without panic. It is pleasure without capital. It is queer in its dissent from capitalization, into the bend of understanding the own i of ourselves, our own assertion of ourselves as never fixed but always many.* I often find myself in the panic of independence and the movement from rejection to embrace to rejection seems to always be in flux.

A Queering Self

There is a certain(kind of, definite) liberation(setting free) in your liberation(letting go) of me(!). At first it often felt too open – too exposed – not confined enough because I was used to feeling love through possession, restrains, obsession – but these loves were (inevitably) brief. You, though, you allowed me (didn't insinuate you were able to allow at all) to be apart from you. Apart/a part – how close they've we've been in those letters. Because I could always go from/come to you anytime, anywhere we are so much more full of motion there was so much more room to expand become multiple explore that

multiplicity. I learned to embrace the pain of being without or at distance from you because that distance is also growth, so close.

Cixous tells us too of the ache of liberty in love. The *i* is not always so simple because it takes such effort; it is never easy because it is always a swim upstream through the “acceptable” river. When it is within the context of defining oneself against another (which is always at play but feels, perhaps, more vital with a lover) it becomes exemplified. She says, “I spent the day wanting to stop loving you, at the worst of the pain I loved you against myself, I wanted to place my head on your shoulder, enter into your chest and double-lock myself in” (124). What an uncanny and parallel experience Cixous seems to be having in this scene. But what a perfect example of heart and fear twisting in on each other. And isn’t it fitting then that it is difficult and strange to occupy this space of duality, other gendered, other creatured, other bodied. No wonder the stigma of the queer (the thing that moves *across*, that is not set and understood and stagnant, the bent language that is so difficult to access without fear and heart) is so violently upheld! It is difficult to occupy the multiple, growth is often wrenchingly painful. And yet the singularity of definition or identity rots in its stagnancy. What can we be without constant pain, constant growth? Only a made object, never alive, for anything alive, even rot, grows and blooms in bright, fragrant colors.

Throughout *Love Itself*, Cixous seems to feel this pain of growth and to understand that it is the merge and move with the *you* and out of the *you* vs. *me* that is the source of that pain. It reshapes herself so far that at one point she states, “I was jealous of my own mouth. It swallows everything and keeps nothing I thought. But I never dared

say to you: I want to swallow your sperm and keep it outside me at the same time. My too little my everything my not enough” (3). In this scene they are so much a part of each other that she is jealous of herself. Yet, Cixous often seems unaware or unwilling to share this merging with *you*. It often comes across (as in this scene) as a pain she feels solipsistically and thus, remains within the development of her own self, and by this within the binary of “feminine” vs. “masculine.” For it to enter into the queer it needs to be shared, both partners must enter each other.

Cixous posits observations of her lover instead of attempting to deconstruct the notions of self and other. She says, “It was very dark. I took advantage of these very brief instants to note down my state in my pocket notebook. He is so strong and so fleeting. I note the fleeting. One can’t imagine two more dissimilar beings” (140). This points, once again, to her clear understanding of the multiplicity of self, but her unwillingness to challenge her lover. The challenge is solely upon herself. This often seems to be an issue in feminism in general. The emphasis is on the woman and her ability to change or to multiply, but the requirements of the man to multiply as well, to enter a queer space, seem, often, less pressing. There are so few male voices speaking out of the structure of the dominant. It is easy to see why, because they are the voice of the dominant already, but Cixous’ reluctance to show the man her own identity being twisted and torqued, once again keeps her voice in the space of absence.

It is tempting to do this, to keep this pain to ourselves. I understand when Cixous states, “It’s all my fault, I should have been silent but of the two of us you’re the one who keeps silent me I keep Speaking and all wrong. I look at the ground, I don’t dare look at you, I sense that if at this moment I phoned you out of the anguish of traveling it’s

someone other than you who would answer me” (139). I write of this temptation so as to move beyond it.

A Queering Self

Late at night, at morning, when I know I should for you (for me) quiet myself, the noise of my love rages inside of me until that creature crawls up my throat and onto my lips. It needs to be fed to be known. You understand that: love knowledge, sustenance. Tough yours (your creature, your/myself) seems to dwell deeper and quieter in the space of yourself, being fed by yourself. Mine wants your food, your savory language so rarely given, so exquisitely delicious.

I want my creature, which is not person or word or animal or identity but something truly beyond a limit of my own understanding, to be known. I want it to move outside of myself, outside of my womanness and into my world. I want it to be about more than myself, because it is! Instead of getting at the multiple female, I am urging discovery of the multiple queer, without gender boundaries, without characteristic boundaries, without genre boundaries, without desire boundaries. A place to the limit of queer where a body meeting a body is queer, no matter the sex. With and out at once.

To write, to assert is to lie. Even that is a lie because the first reading of it is misleading. By to lie I don't mean to be devious or sneaky (though sometimes it is) but rather to tell an untruth. Cixous states:

—*Fidèlement* is a beautiful word, you say, greedy for words as you are/—*Fidèle ment* I say, *faithful lies*. An expression that wouldn't exist today. Who would

write that today?/—Fidelity, I say, how the word defies. It's the word that denounces the infidel I say...I who was making my first distressing literary discoveries, I who was beginning to see fidelity infidelize itself as soon as it touched on Joyce, Kafka, Milton, I who was beginning to see – and that to swear literature is to have to betray (102).

Cixous plays with the word *fidèlement* by showing us that in the word is both the betrayal and the lack of betrayal. She is asserting that there is not one truth but that everything is truth/lie at once or rather simply in a constant attempt to get at some 'kernel' that doesn't really exist, which reifies the notion that nothing (gender, genre, desire, identity) can exist in some ultimately definable, truthful way. So, if there is no essential, then even the most basic and tiny truth about one's self is a lie because we are in flux and it is already changing. However, there is no way to discount the impact of these mitigated untruths we tell. They are important because they are, in the most inclusive and wide reaching sense of the word, a collective truth. This is why I take the time to write this work, why it is still necessary to delve into the pain of deconstruction. Because the more critical the examination of self is, the more inclusive the examination of other.

Illuminating the connection between language and body, Cixous writes of the pain of growth and the inclusion it may facilitate:

And what to think of the letter of 20.1.1996, also a faithfully – a letter of a lacerated beauty, so beautiful, so lacerated, that it seems to have been torn alive out of one of the poem collections (I'm thinking of *The Truth Truly* of course)

but that's not the case – your letters have never been former or future poems – the letter that I will call from now on the *letter-to-the-limit* (102).

What strikes me in this passage is the phrase “*letter-to-the-limit*” which I think reaffirms my assertion that Cixous is stuck at the limit of bi, not because a choice to love either gender is stunting, but rather because it encompasses (in her use of it here and perhaps not in a larger cultural way) Cixous’ assertion that the ‘masculine’ is without redemption rather than able to integrate into a multiplicity. The identity formulated in I is a step toward multiplicity of gender but with a limit. What I suggest is the eruption out of both the vertical and horizontal grids of being and into a limitless space of non-grid. Again, the limit of queer, in theory, lies beyond the gendered body so that any person can inhabit a free, queer space. Man and man. Man and woman. Woman and woman. Or a body which has changed its gender or its sex with any body it chooses. A space in which the labeling of bodies as gendered or sexed or stiffly desirous in a certain way becomes obsolete. No other to set one’s self against because we are all other and not.

What does a space like this look like? Not a redefinition of borders but a removal of them? It is a movement in to the hysteric, the madness of other, the foreignness of the unknown. It has been pointed out that this is a utopian impulse, but what is a utopian impulse if not an imagined opportunity for renegotiation? And what can be renegotiated without first imagining? With this imagination there is fear, deep fear in this thought, and yet also the heart, that multiple thing,

feels a thrill in its liberty. Maybe it is important to go too far (as they say) into the space of imagining a new way of being, to go too far into a new way of writing, to be frightening—so that perhaps the imagined destruction of such a fixed space will then be scarred with a tiny fissure, a tiny space of motion.

In hope and imagination of this crack, to begin there must be a space where all is intentionally shifted away from the everyday that is so dangerous in its assumptions of the essential so that the i (that radical little letter) can begin to be the everyday. Enter movement. Cixous' movement of the self of woman, "varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops traveling, vast astral space. She doesn't revolve around the sun that is more star than the stars" (Cixous, in *Anthology*, 353). Boundless change allows for reanalysis. Even the i may become a burden that needs to be shaken off at some point. Don't all labels? So no one I or i is the solution but rather it is the attempt to shift, to change, to become boundless that is the glorious idea. Otherwise i is solipsism. It is the ultimate sun, blinding the stars with its selfish light.

Continue to be multiple. Luce Irigaray famously muses in her poetic and philosophical book *This Sex*, "We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I've never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations, we make two. Really, two? Doesn't that make you laugh? An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one. Let's leave one to them..." Must "them" be male and we be female? I think we and they are convoluted, bound up in one another. Even in division, we see each other more clearly and are then within one another through

that witnessing. Make “them” those who will not live in freedom, and instead of condemnation, invite them into freedom. Call on Derrida and Cixous and Freud and your mother.

Cixous calls on us:

At that moment I hear an extremely loud and strange miniscule chirping. Just the way a human being’s howl of pain must sound to a god passing by far away: miniscule very loud, smaller than a cricket’s howl but as strident. It ululates. Like a faraway god I hear cricketing clicking the it, the *ça*, terrorized by the smallness that we are...What is striking is the enormous force of weakness (44).

She mixes the animal with human with god, which is as true a thing as I feel I can resay on these pages that they should be mixed and are. So often we are mixed up we say, but are we ever not? I think not. I think that you and me and *ça* and she are all a part of each other and therefore never separate. Cixous speaks to this non-separateness, the queer that is beginning to make itself clear (clarity!) in the self. She states, “I lean over I see you fall all of a sudden on her me who I was, it is there! this brilliant scene returned to fall in front of us, it/she is on the floor on the carpet, it/she is on your face, I see us on your face look at us falling all of a sudden, there” (1). There is a kind of brilliance in this queering because there is a kind of non-ignorance, non-vanity to see the connection to the other that is necessary to identity, the importance of removing the capital in the i. And it is with this attention to even the smallest, (“the smallness that we are...the enormous force”) the *ça* (the it), the letters that do hold real force. Because we can grasp at the smallest and at least try to comprehend change, expansion, multiplicity with each

deconstruction. Cixous queers me with her words, by pointing out the mixed multiplicity within the union of two(of infinite). “—You put these letters to me. Look at you look at me look at that. Look at who. I would have liked not to believe you. What broke out suddenly was fire” (11).

A Queering Self

And so I yell at you, I beat my fists (proverbially speaking) against your chest and tell you, you need to invade me more, tear me up, rip me apart so that we can grow. I want to enter the pain, the pain of growth, the pain of you being me, and maybe leaving me for that being, maybe looking away. I want to know if our element can withstand fire. It is so late at night that I am cold to the bone and I fall into our bed and dream of sweet things (which so rarely happens). And in the morning, when my body has calmed, when my mind has calmed, when I don't feel the need to break down, when I feel more whole (which is a quiet mistruth) I wish for you to hold me instead of tearing at me. Isn't that a kind of joining? Isn't that painful enough with its closeness so decadent it almost burns the mouth? Yes, this too is a kind of queering because in this is an envelopment of the other, a trade of self for self for self. Whether beating fists or hearts, there's always a violence in the merging.

While the merging of two people is central to *Love Itself*, so too is the merging of language with experience of life. As I've pointed to before, Cixous necessitates language as real in the sense that it is not representative of culture but is itself culture.¹² Even the

¹² At this point one should understand the implications of this word as both true and not true and I point to it being real so that language is given equal value to identity, memory, or experience.

title of this book, *Love Itself in the Letterbox*, illustrates this point. It is not simply a letter but rather the experience of love, the object of love that is in the letter, that is the letter, that the letter is. Cixous states:

What would I say about these letters?

First that they are not paper-letters, except in appearing to be so, they are your flesh and my blood.

And yet: I totally forgot them and you don't remember them at all.

They are behind us like our forbears and our gods (91).

They are behind because they are so much a part of the body that they are like breath, unthought but always occurring, always mediating and creating self.

Cixous' view of writing as always a part of herself is self-described as, "if one asks me why or for whom I keep these notebooks, I feel that I cannot answer clearly, I do not read them myself. No one reads them. I have been given the duty, I don't know by whom" (79). And yet Cixous attempts to get at the answer simply by asking it. Because there is an answer to why she writes, why she feels the "duty" of this expression. Why she enters the hysteric, unproductive space of these notebooks. In fact, it seems to me that these notebooks, in their "uselessness," are a queer work. They are not created for the capital, for the politic, for the mainstream; they are created simply for creation's sake, without the need of an other goal but in the habitation of other itself. I call on Christine Mawkward, in her essay "To Be or Not to Be" summarizes female creativity saying it is

“open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to ‘speak the body,’ i.e., the unconscious” (Mawward, 96). Mawward’s assertion layers Cixous’ notebooks first by revealing the writing’s subversive attempt to move away from the “masculine” normalization. However, Cixous does not reach the necessary step of inhabiting the *you* or rather of this writing inhabiting the *you*. Cixous cannot reach a queer space because of this oneway interaction, but rather remains in the “feminine,” unable to truly shed a structure from which to break so that no structure remains but the multiple chaotic, the fragmented identity of that choice and into a queer, ungended space of being. Cixous has failed to cross this boundary out of the “feminine” and so remains trapped in a dichotomy which she must play in or against.

But! I believe that Cixous attempted this even through her *bi* because she calls the *bi* multiple. She comes to the edge, looks over, but steps back. We see this edge as she describes her madness of love of writing: “It is so beautiful, so wonderfully drawn, the fine hurried lines, a wind blowing from the right side of the letter. And the punctuation marks, everywhere ellipses, quiverings, dashes, brackets; and the parentheses. As if you were pushing the bed aside, discovering a trap door that, once the secret stairs are descended, opens onto the forest” (107-108). And yet she never quite enters the space of feeling that she can really share her multiplicity with *you*. She speaks of her own speech as often wrong which is a temptation within the confines of a “feminine” writing because there is the guilt of so fully subverting the “masculine.” She speaks this guilt:

I say this sadly in embarrassment I confess a theft an indecency a very small great crime... It's all my fault, I should have been silent but of the two of us you're the one who keeps silent me I keep Speaking and all wrong. I look at the ground, I don't dare look at you, I sense that if at this moment I phoned you out of the anguish of traveling it's someone other than you who would answer me (139).

Cixous keeps speaking trying to circle back while he keeps silent, keeps straight. In this reaffirmation of masculine vs. feminine, wouldn't they be served better, understand each other better, if they could avoid such strict boundaries? Embarrassment seems to come from feeling unjustified; pride seems to come from overjustification. So then a movement out of under/over justness, out of right/wrong, into explanation and inhabitation might help. And yet her embarrassment is realized because she inhabits him but he does not inhabit her. Here is where the queer must take a hold and move out of *écriture feminine* and into a language where proof or assertion of definition is unnecessary. Peggy Phelan states, "The 'politics' of the imagined and actual exchange of gaze are most clearly exposed in relation to sexual difference. At once an attempt to stabilize 'difference' and an attempt to repress the 'sexual' itself, cultural representation seeks both to conceal and reveal a real that will 'prove' that sexual difference is a real difference" (Phelan, 108). Phelan is asserting that there is power in both the imagined and the actual experience "the actual exchange of gaze" and that by revealing that both imagination and "reality" have weight, one is able to use both the created self (culturally influenced) and the "real" self (the self which one cannot separate from the imagined and is believed to be innate). Therefore, one is unable to find a fixed place and yet is so driven to find that fixity that they will put themselves further into a categorization out of

fear. However, if one is able to recognize and negotiate this fear and realize that it is impossible to sustainably prove difference, if we can get away from the need to write from a place of constant definition of an essential self, then we can see that we are both different (in our imagined self) and not (in the knowledge that our identity formation comes from that imagination) at once.

Without the construction of fixity, the deconstructed (and inevitably trembling) self can understand itself through language through a multiplication and expansion of the thing that is not signifier or being but is being. In the final lines of *Différance*, Derrida muses about Heidegger's assertion that every word and thought are "hazardous" to the being, "Such is the question: the marriage between speech and Being in the unique word, in the finally proper name. Such is the question that enters into the affirmation put into play by *différance*. The question bears (upon) each of the words in this sentence: "Being / speaks / through every language; / everywhere and always /." In other words (in "every language"!) we are always being mediated / Beings mediated / Beings (without mediation but rather without space between / by language. We are language. Language is us. So how we choose to use that language determines how we negotiate the world. The more expansive, the more expansive. Cixous steps into this space, influenced by Derrida, by Freud, by Lispector, by Joyce, by Irigaray, by *you*, by you, by all that is past, present and future. While she stays within the limits of the feminine and thereby enters a kind of limited space in which her ecstatic I can only go so far, she pushes the envelope (and allows me to push back) so as to understand the multiplicity of the self, the genre, the moment, the identity, and the other. "People would say to me: pooh. You're mad!" (55). Cixous says, and yet I believe her madness needs to be taken farther, into the fear and the

heart twisting together in pain so as to grow out of the demand for essentialization and into the tiny, infinite space of the i.

A Queering Self

When the madness is aroused in me, especially on these dark clear nights with the window open for the world to come on to me, i have no place to go but to these keys. To this tap tap tapping that quiets that need to speak. To speak INTO the silence that is you, that i cannot understand because it is you and not me. But you are not a closed silence, you are open, open to take me in, to learn my language, so that i'll know you you'll know me, somehow love you love me, in that silence, in that opening.

But i am not a silent person – that is a language i don't often know. And so i pluck away, i twist these stiff sheets, i breathe loudly in competition with the wind, to make noise for me for you. i don't understand silence, being made of words. i long to sing out into the death of the void that says my madness is mad, not perfect! as it tortuously feels.

And yet! i now see that in its own way, silence is as vast, as multiple, as intelligent as sound. Silence allows my noise, allows me to tap into it, disrupt it, be heard within it. You occupy the “woman's” space in your silence, the unsaid, the unrecorded, the absence of being that blooms into being. We are subverted by one another, bending toward each other in the night.

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